



Support Efforts to Reform Fire Disaster Funding

Federal Wildfire Funding Needs Reform

The current federal funding system to address fire suppression is deeply flawed. Under federal law, the Departments of Agriculture and Interior forecast fire suppression budgets based on average spending amounts over the past ten years. When budgeted funds are inadequate to support fire suppression, as frequently occurs, the agencies take funds from other accounts—including forest management funds that are needed to prevent future fires and restore the forest after a fire occurs. This cycle of “fire-borrowing” denies the agencies of critical funds needed to maintain healthy forests, and leads to a cycle of more devastating fires and continued depletion of forest management funds. While Congress provided disaster funding in 2017 to cover a portion of the costs of responding to the catastrophic wildfires in California, a long-term solution is needed.

Wildfires Thwart Climate Efforts

Fires release tons of uncontrolled carbon emissions into the atmosphere, and if the damaged and fallen trees are left to decay; additional tons of carbon are released. The 2015 Valley, Butte, Jerusalem, and Rocky fires—that impacted NCPA plants and employees—burned a combined 241,491 acres of land, approximately equal to the amount of land burned by the Rim Fire in 2013 (the fourth largest wildfire in California history). Initial estimates indicate that the Rim Fire more than 11 million metric tons of GHG emissions. Based on the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's website, those emissions are roughly equivalent to the following:

- Annual greenhouse gas emissions from 2.3 million cars;
- Carbon dioxide emissions from 1.2 billion gallons of gasoline consumed;
- Carbon dioxide emissions from the electricity required to power 1.5 million homes for one year; and;
- Annual carbon dioxide emissions of 3.2 coal-fired power plants.

In 2017, California experienced both the largest (Thomas Fire) and the most destructive (Tubbs Fire) wildfires in the state's history. Over 1.2 million acres of land were burned, thousands of structures destroyed, and many lives lost. The intensity and frequency of wildfires will only worsen: in the absence of needed thinning and removal of underbrush, forests that historically hosted 50-60 trees per acre can now average 350 trees per acre—creating dangerously high fuel accumulations. This is a critical challenge that warrants immediate action.

As the frequency and destructiveness of wildfires increase, proactive measures must be implemented to mitigate against wildfire risks as much as possible. These fires undermine and set back the significant greenhouse gas reduction efforts that have been undertaken in the electricity industry and economy-wide. This problem is only exacerbated when renewable energy projects located in remote areas are taken out of service or damaged due to wildfires.

**New Funding
Mechanism
Needed**

Major wildfires need to be treated like other major natural disasters to ensure adequate and equitable funding. Toward that end, several measures have been introduced in both the House and Senate that include provisions to fund catastrophic fires under a separate federal disaster account—just like funding for other catastrophic natural disasters. Removing those mega-fires from the regular budget will free up a substantial amount of new funding for essential fire prevention and hazardous fuels reduction projects that are critical activities that can help break the cycle of increasingly dangerous and costly fires. Under these proposals, any spending above 70% of the 10-year average for fire suppression would be eligible for disaster funding, with the remaining funding secured through annual appropriations. As well, the Administration's FY 2019 Budget calls for treating wildfires like other natural disasters. NCPA strongly supports the advancement of such provisions, particularly as the incidence and severity of wildfires rapidly escalate.

NCPA supports swift enactment of legislation to provide predictable, adequate, and equitable funding of fire suppression and prevention activities to reduce undue carbon emissions and protect renewable and other generating facilities in fire-prone areas throughout California.